

Italian Arum Control

Although the noxious weed control community is working hard on a solution, so far infestations around Washington and Oregon have proven nearly impossible to kill. For example, a 2-acre infestation on Lopez Island actually worsened after it was repeatedly mowed, dug, torched (in winter), and then covered with a heavy tarp. Contact your county noxious weed board for the latest control methods. **Always wear protective clothing and avoid skin contact when controlling Italian arum. Keep children away from this plant and its bright, colorful fruits.**

Mechanical: Homeowners can try to dig out small infestations, taking care not to break tubers. Improper digging will only spread the plant. At minimum, cut and bag the fruit in August, before it scatters its seeds. Discard plants and tubers in plastic bags in the trash, as improper disposal spreads infestations. Do not move soil from infested sites to new areas or compost piles.



Image by Dr. Tim Miller

Chemical: A recent greenhouse study showed that several herbicides (glyphosate, sulfometuron, metsulfuron, imazapyr, dicamba, and 2,4-D) kill the foliage of Italian arum, but damage to tubers was only variable. Their ability to sprout later has not been assessed. Using a tank mixture or alternating products in follow-up treatments might be more effective than using just one product. Always read and follow the label instructions before applying any herbicides for proper rate, treatment sites, and timing. Check with your local county noxious weed board for specific herbicide recommendations.

Contact Us

If you have questions about identification or control about Italian arum or other noxious weeds, we can help. Please contact us at:

WA State Noxious Weed Control Board
P.O. Box 42560; Olympia, WA 98504
360-725-5764
<http://www.nwcb.wa.gov>

Or contact your local county noxious weed control board:

Noxious Weeds in Washington

Noxious weeds are nonnative, invasive plants that are highly competitive, destructive, or difficult to control.

They decrease agricultural production, degrade native plant and wildlife habitat, reduce recreational opportunities, lower property values, and can create a public health hazard.

Italian arum is a Class C noxious weed in Washington State. Check with your county noxious weed control board or go to http://www.nwcb.wa.gov/nwcb_county.htm to see if control is required where you live.



Italian Arum

Arum italicum



A toxic, noxious weed
in Washington

Why is it a noxious weed?

Italian arum is poisonous, destroys riparian and other sensitive habitats, and is extremely difficult to control. It has escaped in several counties in western Washington and is invading more areas rapidly. Spreading in yard debris and contaminated compost, it may also escape from gardens into natural areas. Any part of the plant can cause severe skin irritation, illness, or death to people, livestock, and wildlife. In open areas, it can shade out small native plants and keep other plants from establishing. Its tubers multiply yearly to create new plants, and birds spread the seeds.



How does it spread?

Spreading by both roots and seeds, Italian arum rapidly forms colonies. In the plant's second growing season, tubers can produce "daughter tubers," which break off and grow new plants the following year. Birds eat and disperse seeds, which can also spread to new locations in water. Throwing out parts of the plant in yard waste is a major cause of new infestations.



image by Danielle Cowley

Identification

Italian arum (*Arum italicum*), also called "Lords-and-Ladies," "Italian lily," and "Cuckoo's pint" is an ornamental groundcover to 1.5 feet tall. Leaves emerge from tuberous roots in fall, stay green all winter, and die back in summer.

- Arrowhead-shaped leaves can be all green or have cream-colored or silver-gray veins, purple splotches, or speckles.
- Flowers (April–June) are an unpleasant-smelling, yellowish, fingerlike spadix with a pale hood, or spathe.
- Fruits (August–September) are orange-red and cluster tightly in oblong spikes.
- Thick underground tubers store much of the plant's energy and water underground, which is why the tops regrow so easily when cut or mowed. One way the plant reproduces is by producing buds, called "daughter tubers," which detach and form new plants.



photos courtesy Dr. Tim Miller

Where does it grow?

Originally cultivated as a garden ornamental, Italian arum grows in partial to full shade. Although it prefers moist, humusy soils, Italian arum can grow in nearly any soil and can tolerate drought once established. Italian arum has been escaping cultivation and is now establishing in forests, in disturbed urban areas, near streams and rivers, and in wetlands.



Native to temperate parts of Europe and Asia, escaped patches of Italian arum are found primarily in western Washington. Unfortunately, this noxious weed appears to be spreading rapidly.



An Italian arum infestation degrades native habitat owned by the San Juan County Land Bank on Lopez Island. Photo courtesy San Juan County NWCB.